

THE ENCHANTED & MOUNTAIN &



ELIZA ORNE WHITE

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ELIZA ORNE WHITE

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THE BLUE AUNT
THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN
BROTHERS IN FUR
A BORROWED SISTER
AN ONLY CHILD
EDNAH AND HER BROTHERS
A LITTLE GIRL OF LONG AGO
WHEN MOLLY WAS SIX



THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN



ELIZA ORNE WHITE

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THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN



You must work five minutes longer for each word you say

THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN

BY
ELIZA ORNE WHITE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
E. POLLAK OTTENDORFF



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TO

M. T. E.

A LITTLE GIRL OF THE PAST

AND

J. T. E.

A LITTLE BOY OF THE PRESENT

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED

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From drawings by E. Pollak-Ottendorff

THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN

CHAPTER I

THE START

ONCE there were four children who lived in a village a few miles from an Enchanted Mountain, which they had longed all their lives to climb. Two of them were boys and two were girls, and they lived next door to each other, although it did not seem quite like one's idea of next door, as there was a green meadow between the two houses, with a vegetable garden and a fruit orchard. This was very convenient, for when they went to see each other they could stop to eat a tomato, or an apple, or whatever chanced to be ripe at the time.

The boy and girl who lived in the white house covered with green vines were Peter and Phoebe Green, and their father and mother, who were also Peter and Phoebe, had named their small cottage "The Pod," because there were four green P's in it. The children who lived in the gray stone house among the cedars were Esther and John Darlington.

Peter was the eldest of the children, which is not saying a great deal, as they were all under eleven. He was very proud of being two months older than Esther. This is the way their ages came.

Peter Green, ten and eleven months,
Esther Crosby Darlington, ten and nine months,
John Aiken Darlington, eight and six months, and
Phoebe Green, the baby of the company, seven
and one month.

One July morning Peter and his sister Phoebe started to come over to see Esther and John, but stopped in the garden to eat some gooseberries that were particularly delicious. There they met John, who was on his way to see them, but had lingered at the gooseberry bushes.

"Mother and father heard that grandmother was n't well, so they started off in a great hurry," said John. "Father expects to come back to-night, but he said if anything happened so he could n't, we were to spend the night at your house."

"That is funny," said Peter.

He was always a deliberate boy, and before he could finish his sentence his small sister had cut in ahead of him.

"Father and mother have gone on a sketching trip," she said. "They told us if they had great

luck and got on the track of any elves or fairies they might be gone over night, and we were to spend the night at your house."

"We've got a whole long day to do what we please in," cried John, with delight. "No weeding of gardens, no lessons, nothing but play."

This seemed so wonderful that the three children were all of them wild with joy. They celebrated the occasion by cramming their mouths with gooseberries and dancing about the garden.

"I tell you what let's do," suggested John. "Let's go to the Enchanted Mountain."

"Yes," cried Phoebe with glee. "We've always wanted to go, and this is our grand chance."

"I'm sure that father and mother would n't want us to go without leave," said Peter.

"We'll get back before they do, and we'll have lots of interesting things to tell them," said Phoebe.

"That's so," agreed John.

Peter was still doubtful, but the other children overruled his objections. After making their plans they went over to tell Esther of the great project.

Now Esther was the only one of the children who had had a fairy godmother at her christening, and so she had more gifts of character than all the rest of them put together. It had happened in this way.

The fairy, who was a friend of both families, had been at a distance when Peter was christened, and so was only able to send messages of congratulation; but in the case of Esther she had been in the neighborhood, and although she had to leave before the ceremony was quite over, so that Esther never had all the characteristics a fairy's godchild is entitled to, she had received a great many. The fairy godmother had brought along a green bag made of oak leaves, and in this bag were the different qualities for Esther's character. They all had to begin with the first letter of one of her three names, Esther Crosby Darlington. Unfortunately, Mrs. Darlington had not known this beforehand. The fairy godmother said that Esther would be energetic, efficient, emphatic, excellent, conscientious, conservative, cautious, cheerful; she had just begun with the D's and had fortunately pronounced her "delightful," when she heard that another christening party that she had forgotten all about had been waiting for her for an hour. She was going to give Esther "a dash of daring," which her character needed to give spice to it, when she had to hurry away.

Mrs. Darlington had been somewhat disappointed with the result of the christening.

"If I had known she must have the qualities

beginning with the first letters of her name, I would have called her Beatrice Frances; then she would have been beautiful, brilliant, and fascinating," she sighed.

But Mr. Darlington was entirely satisfied. It was a great comfort to him to have such a reliable daughter. They decided, however, when it came to John, that they would chance it and trust to Nature for the combination of his qualities. And it happened that he had that very dash of daring that was lacking in his sister.

But if Esther sometimes tried the family with her caution and conscience, she was on the whole a truly delightful person, and they could none of them have lived without her. And when her mother bade her good-by on this memorable morning, and told her to look after John and to bake the bread, she was as sure of her doing it as if she were to be there herself to superintend her.

Esther was putting her bread into the pans when the children arrived. If she did not have the beauty her mother had desired for her, she was a delightful-looking girl, with a wholesome, pleasant face.

"Esther, stick that bread into the oven quick, and come with us," said her brother, "for we are all going to the Enchanted Mountain."

"No, you are not," said Esther with her usual decision. "You are all going to play in the garden, for I promised mother I would look after you."

"But we did n't promise anything," said John.

"And we are not any relation to you, Esther Crosby Darlington," said Phoebe.

Phoebe admired Esther more than any other person in the whole world, and she was her dearest friend, but there were moments when Esther was very trying, and on these occasions Phoebe always called her by her full name.

"Esther is right," said Peter, who always thought that Esther was right. "Phoebe, we'll go into the garden and hunt for elves."

"But there have n't been any there since the time father frightened them away. You know there aren't any there," complained Phoebe. "I am going to the Enchanted Mountain if I have to go alone."

Phoebe was small and slight, and in her brown frock with her brown hair falling about her shoulders, she looked like a little brown bird when she waved her arms as if she were flapping her wings.

"Good-by, everybody," she called out, as she ran along the grass-grown road that led between two rows of pines towards the Enchanted Mountain;

“good-by, brother Peter, good-by, John dear, good-by, Esther Crosby Darlington. I am going all alone, without any one to take care of me but the birds and beasts. I am going all alone to the Enchanted Mountain.”

Then a wonderful thing happened. A brown bird suddenly appeared in the blue sky just ahead of Phoebe, and it called her name; “Phoebe, Phoebe,” it cried.

“I am going all alone to the Enchanted Mountain,” Phoebe called back. “All alone, all alone, with only the dear bird that has my name to take care of me. Little brown bird, we’ll go together, you and I.”

This was too much for John. “I will go with you,” he said.

“Come back, John, come back,” commanded Esther. She had slipped inside and put the loaves into the oven. Closing the oven door, she had run quickly into the front hall.

John shook his head. “Phoebe needs some one to take care of her,” said he.

Peter looked uncertainly from Esther to Phoebe. He was always a slow boy, but he had a loving, chivalrous heart, and at present it was torn between affection for his small sister and regard for Esther.

"I guess I had better go with Phoebe," he said finally. "She's so small."

Esther stood in the doorway, looking at the little procession longingly. Was it not perhaps her duty, after all, to go with the others, since she had promised to take care of John? How could she take care of him if he were far away from her on the mountain?

But she had also promised to bake the bread. There were three loaves, and if she were to leave them in the oven they would be burned to a cinder.

The children were getting out of sight now, but Esther could still hear the phoebe bird in the distance. "Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe," it sang.

CHAPTER II

THE THREE ROADS

MEANWHILE Phoebe and the boys went quickly along the grass-grown road that led in the direction of the Enchanted Mountain. Peter was the only one who looked back, and when he saw Esther watching them with that wistful face, he had a strong inclination to leave the others and join her. But he had always longed to go to the Enchanted Mountain, and besides, there was his little sister; he surely ought to be at hand to protect her. So he resolutely turned his face towards the mountain and tried not to think of Esther again.

It was a glorious July morning, a day that seemed to have slipped in by mistake from some other month, October perhaps, so the children did not get overheated with their long walk. They began to get tired, however, and very hungry, by the time the sun pointed to the fact that it was high noon.

"I've just got to have something to eat," said Phoebe, sitting down on a rock by the roadside.

There was not a house to be seen, and the whole

region was so wild and the woods were filled with such a growth of underbrush, that it did not seem as if any food could be found.

"Esther ought to have made us take some lunch with us," grumbled John.

"Well, I like that!" said Peter. "You did n't expect Esther to fit us out with food when she told us not to come?"

"Perhaps the phoebe bird will know where there is something to eat," said her namesake. "It has been following us most of the way."

But the phoebe bird was nowhere to be seen, and although the children called her name, one at a time and then all together, she did not answer.

"Suppose we turn back," said Peter. "The Enchanted Mountain seems as far off as it did when we started."

"Turn back!" cried Phoebe, "I'm going if I get starved on the road."

"So am I," said John.

They heard the desolate call of crows, who seemed signaling to each other. One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four, and then two sharp calls.

"There is food somewhere if there are crows," said Peter sagely.

And presently, to their surprise and joy, they came

to a clearing in the woods and saw that it was filled with fragrant wild strawberries. The children got down on their hands and knees and began to eat their delicious lunch.

"We had better pick some," said the prudent Peter, "and take them along in case we don't find anything else to eat. Wild strawberries were gone long ago at home. I wonder if these are enchanted, or if it is just that the land is higher here?"

"What can we pick them in?" asked John.

Peter offered his straw hat as a basket. They lined it with leaves and soon filled it to the brim; in fact, the strawberries were piled up so high that some of them fell out and were scattered on the ground.

The road now began to ascend so abruptly that it seemed as if they were on a foot-hill of the Enchanted Mountain, but the summit still looked very far away. They were near enough, however, to see the gleam of something white through the trees.

"It looks like a house," said Phoebe.

"I am sure it is just a rock," said her brother.

They went on and on. It seemed miles and miles to the children, and still that provoking mountain appeared to retreat farther and farther into the distance.

"Perhaps that is the enchanted part of it, that we never get there," suggested Peter.

The sun was getting low in the horizon and the colors in the western sky made the children feel as if they were nearing the enchanted land. The golden glow seemed to melt into pink, while there was an infinite number of flecks of white, like a flock of celestial sheep, and the green hemlocks and firs made dark points against the brightness.

"Dear me, we shan't get home to-night," said Phoebe dolefully.

"What did you expect?" her brother asked. "I thought you were ready to starve on the road."

"If it had n't been for you," said John ungallantly, "we should never have got into this fix. We could have gone much faster, and we'd have had sense enough to turn back when we found we were n't getting anywhere."

He looked at Phoebe as he spoke. Two large tears were making their way down her cheeks.

"You boys need n't bother about me," she said; "you can leave me here if you like, and go off and see if you can find a road up the mountain. I'm not afraid of anything. I am sure if there are any beasts they will be good to me."

Her brown eyes looked so appealing that John's heart melted.

"I guess it's Peter and me that are the beasts," he said remorsefully. "Peter, you stay here with her, and I'll go on and see if I can find a road."

"No, we'll all stick together," said Peter. "We'll come along, too."

The path had now grown very steep, for they were on the mountain at last. John ran on ahead as usual, and finally he gave a cry of joy.

"Here's a place where three roads meet," he said. "There are guide-posts with signs cut in birch bark. Oh, there are really and truly houses on the mountain. I was sure there were."

The others caught up with him quickly.

"High Wall Lodge," he read. "That's the place for us to go to."

"Fare Well Palace," said Peter. "I like the sound of that best. I'm sure it means that they have good things to eat."

"I think it means that it is a kind of a prison," said Phoebe, "and that if you go there you have to say farewell to everybody."

"But look, the words are divided," said Peter. "It means fare well, and that we'll have lots of good things to eat. And I'm glad. I'm getting tired of wild strawberry jam."

"But there is just a knot of birch bark between

the words," objected Phoebe. "See this other sign. It is best of all. 'Nowork Castle.' I've always wanted to go to a castle. Do you suppose it is an Indian name?"

"No," said Peter, "I think it means that we won't have to do any work if we go there. But I'd rather go to the place where they'll give us good food."

"I think it would be lovely not to have to work," said Phoebe. "There won't be any lessons, and we won't have to weed any gardens."

Phoebe began to climb the steep road that led to Nowork Castle, while Peter ascended that which went to Fare Well Palace, and John ran along the path leading to High Wall Lodge.

"Come with me," cried Phoebe.

"No, my path is much the best," said Peter.

"We must all stick together," said John. "Come along, we'll spend the night at High Wall Lodge."

"Well, I like that," objected Peter; "if we are all to stick together, why don't you and Phoebe stick to me?"

John was so determined, however, that the other children reluctantly joined him.

As Phoebe was climbing the steep path, which was very rough and much longer than they had expected, she put her hand to her hat to straighten it,

and found that the brown ribbon that fastened her hair back had slipped off.

"That's too bad," she said. "I'm afraid we'll never find it."

"We'll find it on our way back to-morrow," said Peter.

Home now began to present a picture of cheerful comfort.

"I suppose we can spend the night out of doors like the Babes in the Woods," said Phoebe, for High Wall Lodge seemed to loom up very far away.

The pink glow had faded and twilight was coming on. Everything looked very desolate. Finally the stars began to come out like the street lamps in the village at home.

"They are lighting up for us in the sky," said Phoebe. It seemed homelike to see the old familiar stars.

They had a hard, long scramble, and finally they reached High Wall Lodge, a sombre mass of rough, irregular stones, with small, uneven slits for windows. The light was shining through them faintly. There was a rough door with a brass knocker, and John gave a loud, resounding knock. Presently an old man with a long white beard opened the door a crack.

"Who comes here at this time of night?" he demanded.

The children gave their names. "Can we spend the night with you?" they asked.

"No one comes here who does not work for his night's lodging and his food," he said. "You don't look to me much like the working kind."

The children glanced at each other shamefacedly.

"We might spend the night outside," suggested lazy John.

"What sort of work do we have to do?" asked prudent Peter.

"I shall not tell you. Will you come in or will you stay outside?"

He opened the door invitingly, and Phoebe saw a bright fire, which looked most attractive, for the night on top of the high mountain was far colder than in the valley.

Almost unconsciously she stepped across the threshold, and the old man was about to close the heavy door.

"Let me in, too," cried her brother Peter.

"And me, too," said John.

They both squeezed in past the old man.

"What would Esther say if she could see us now?" said John.

CHAPTER III

ESTHER BAKES THE BREAD

MEANWHILE Esther was baking the bread. She gave a wistful glance out of the window every now and then, and once she went up to the roof, where there was a railed-in place, and looked long at the Enchanted Mountain; but she could see nothing of the children. At last the bread was baked. There were three loaves with the brown crust done to a turn. Nothing could be more perfect than Esther's bread. She looked at it with pride.

It was now dinner time and Esther sat down to her lonely meal, feeling that she had never known so long a day. How delightful it would be when evening came, and her dear father returned, and how proud he would be of her. John would doubtless be back by that time, and he would be scolded for running away without leave, and Esther would be praised for her obedience. Yet as the afternoon wore on and the children did not come back, Esther began to feel very uneasy. Would it have been better to have gone with them? She could

then have seen that they came home in time for supper.

It was six o'clock now, and there was not a sign of the children. The days were still so long that there would be two hours more before dark. Esther kept the supper waiting until half-past seven, for she hoped against hope that she would have companions to eat it with her. After supper she went over to the other house, thinking that Mr. and Mrs. Green might have come back, but there was no sign of them. As it grew darker and darker she became more and more uneasy, and finally when it was black night she was so worried and nervous that she walked about from room to room, looking out of the front windows twenty times an hour. Once she walked a little way down the road. She did not like to go any distance from the house.

At last it was time for her father to come. She lighted the six lamps and put them all in the parlor so as to have an illumination in honor of his home-coming. After a time she heard a footstep on the road. It did not sound like her father's step, it was so light and quick, but Esther hoped it was her father, and she threw the front door wide open. A boy in a blue jacket thrust a letter into her hand.

She tore open the envelope and read: —

DEAR ESTHER, —

Your grandmother is better, but we shall both stay until she is well enough to come back with us. You must spend the nights with the Greens. Take good care of the house and of John.

YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER.

“There’s another letter for the folks next door,” said the boy. “The place is shut up tight. Maybe you’d better read it.”

Esther took it and the boy disappeared into the darkness.

The letter was addressed to Peter Green and said,

DEAR PETER, —

The sketching is fine. We have got on the track of elves. We shall stay several days. You must spend the nights at the Darlingtons’. Look after Phoebe.

YOUR LOVING MOTHER.

Esther was very unhappy, and when she went to bed she could not sleep, but tossed about, trying to decide what she ought to do. She did not like to add to her parents’ worries by letting them know that the children had not come home. She could not bear

to leave the house unguarded, and yet she felt she ought to go in search of the children.

The next morning she looked wistfully at her three loaves of bread ; she was a thrifty child, and she did not like to think of their being wasted. She finally decided to take one loaf with her. She found a box and packed the bread in it, adding a pat of butter and a knife, a tumbler of marmalade, some slices of cold meat, and half a dozen hard-boiled eggs. She felt very lonely as she sat down to write a note to her father and mother to leave on the table in the front hall. This was what she said:—

DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—

I know you would think it more important for me to take care of John than of the house, so I am going in search of him. He left yesterday morning with Peter and Phoebe for the Enchanted Mountain. They would go in spite of all I could say, and I could n't go with them, for you had told me to bake the bread. It came out fine, three loaves, but what good is it with no one here to eat it? I think it will be more sencible, or is it sensible? to go in search of John, so I am doing that.

YOUR VERY LOVING ESTHER.

Esther had put on a clean blue linen frock with a white guimpe, and she took her shade hat off the peg. It was trimmed with a soft white scarf and a cluster of blue corn flowers. She looked very fresh and wholesome as she started down the road with the paper box in her hand. It was a hot morning, and she had not gone far before she wished that the children had chosen some other month than July for their travels.

“How the weather has changed since yesterday,” she thought.

She had gone about two miles when she saw a man coming towards her in a bright red cart. She knew the man long before he was near enough for her to recognize him, because every one else had blue carts, except this one man, a peddler from beyond the mountain. Twice a year he came through the town with his wares.

“Hullo,” said Esther to the peddler, for he seemed like an old friend.

“Hullo,” said the peddler. “Why, it’s little Miss Darlington.”

Esther had never been called Miss Darlington before, and it made her feel quite grown up.

“Where are you going so early in the morning?” he asked.

“To hunt for my brother, and Peter and Phoebe Green. They went to the Enchanted Mountain yesterday and they have not come back.”

The peddler shook his head and drew a long face.

“Turn right round, little girl,” he said, “and go straight back where you came from. Those that go to the Enchanted Mountain are n’t heard from for many a long day, sometimes not for years. Why, there was a man in our town —” he lowered his voice to a whisper — “but I won’t speak of him, it’s best not.”

“But if there’s so much danger there, I must go and get the children back before anything happens to them,” said poor Esther.

“Jump in here,” said the peddler, “and I’ll take you home.”

She shook her head. “Father told me to take care of John,” she explained. “But what happened to the man, please?”

“He’d been at the work-house, and he’d been a tramp, and when he came back (he was gone nigh on two years) you would n’t have known him. He looked real spruced up and yet there was an expression in his eyes as if he had been through things, and he would n’t talk about his experiences; he could n’t, he said. It was one of the rules of the

place. You could n't speak of your experiences ; you had to swear not to ; if you did something awful would happen. Only, times when he was working alongside of me (I used to work on the road then), he would break out and say, 'Talk of work, gosh !' And sometimes when we were sharing a room he would say, 'Talk of beds, gosh !' and the same when we were eating. So I made up my mind to steer clear of that mountain. Jump in with me, little girl, and I'll take you home."

"No," said Esther firmly, "if the mountain is such a bad place, I must go as fast as I can and get them home."

"Well, I am not responsible for what happens to you," said the peddler. "Geddap," he added to the horse.

Esther felt very lonely as the red cart disappeared in the distance, but her conscience told her that she was doing right.

It was a long and tiresome day, for it was so hot that she could not walk fast. About noontime she came upon traces of the children, for she saw the strawberries that they had scattered along the roadside. The path grew wilder and wilder as it came near the mountain, and Esther felt more and more worried about the children. It was not until she

reached the sign-posts, however, that she began to be really troubled; but when she saw the three roads, she had no idea which one they had taken. Dusk was coming on and she felt she must reach some shelter before night. Just then she looked along the road that led to "Nowork Castle."

"This is the brown ribbon from Phoebe's hair," said Esther. "That decides it. I will go to Nowork Castle."

CHAPTER IV

A NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN

ESTHER went cheerfully along the steep path, very sure that she should find the children, and finally she saw a large stone castle, like those she had seen in picture books, with turrets and battlements. It looked as if it had stepped out of the middle ages. She felt a little timid as she walked up to the high door, that was guarded by two stone lions. There was a bell and also a knocker in the form of a griffin, — at least it was like Esther's idea of a griffin, for it had a curious head and very strange wings. She rang the bell and also gave a knock with the griffin.

It seemed a long time before the door was opened, but at last a charming young lady, wearing a gown that shimmered like silver, came to the door. She had golden hair and it was tied with a blue ribbon, and she wore a necklace of turquoises.

"I have come to see if my brother, John Darlington, and Peter and Phoebe Green came here yesterday to spend the night," said Esther.

The young lady opened the door a little wider.

"No one came here yesterday," she said. "Won't you come in? We'd be glad to have you stay with us."

Esther looked longingly at the attractive hall so regally furnished, but she shook her head.

"Then they must have gone along one of the other roads," she said. "Do you suppose they would be more likely to go to Fare Well Palace, or to High Wall Lodge?"

"I cannot tell you," said the girl.

"Are they comfortable places?" asked Esther. "Would they be happy there?"

The young lady hesitated.

"We are not permitted to speak of the other houses on the mountain," she said.

"I suppose I ought to go to the place where the three roads meet," said Esther; "then I'll find them, whichever way they start to come home."

"Those who go to High Wall Lodge," began the girl, but hesitated. "If they have gone to High Wall Lodge, or Fare Well Palace either, they are not likely to come out to-day or to-morrow," she said. "This is as much as I can say. Won't you spend the night with us and then go for them to-morrow, or wait for them here? They have to come here before they leave the mountain; it is the law."

"No," said Esther. "If it is not comfortable at the other places, I must be there to look out for them, but I thank you just the same."

"I shall see you again," said the girl.

Esther went sadly down to the meeting of the three roads and lay down among the bushes to spend the night.

She had the phoebe bird for company. It came and perched on a neighboring bush, and whenever Esther, who was a timid child, felt particularly forlorn, the friendly bird called cheerily, "Phoebe, phoebe, phoebe."

"I wish you would tell me where Phoebe is," said Esther.

There were strange noises on the mountain, rustlings and patterings as of little feet scurrying back and forth among the bushes, and once something came and thrust a cold nose into Esther's hand, while a warm tongue began to lick her arm.

"Whatever you are, you furry thing, please be good to me, for I am not going to do you any harm," she said.

And presently she heard the animal rustling off again through the darkness.

Esther began to wish she had taken the advice of the beautiful young lady and waited for the children

in that comfortable castle. At last, however, she fell asleep, and did not wake until the sun was shining straight into her face, a golden ball floating in a pink mist of clouds. She felt dazed at first and could not think where she was. Then she rubbed her eyes and looked out on the world of forests.

There was the phoebe bird, perching on the nearest bush and singing its heart out to the sun.

Esther tidied her hair and then she ate some more of her lunch.

"I shall sit here, where the three roads meet, most of the day," she thought, "and then if they don't come I shall go first to one place and then to the other to hunt for them."

She had been sitting there about an hour when she heard a footstep on the path, and she looked up eagerly, hoping it might be one of the children. It sounded like a heavy footstep and she was afraid it was that of some older person.

Presently a collie dog came and jumped up on her. It was an attractive yellow and white dog and seemed very glad to see her. Behind the dog came his master, a tired-looking man in a worn suit of clothes.

"Can you tell me the way to Nowork Castle?" the man asked.



Behind the dog came his master

"Yes," said Esther, "you go along that road where the sign is."

"I can't read," said the man, "so I did n't know which way to go."

"Have you come from one of the houses on the mountain?" Esther asked eagerly. "Have you seen anything of my brother, John Darlington, or of Peter and Phoebe Green?"

"There were no children where I came from," said the man. "I've been stopping at Fare Well Palace, and I've just got through there."

"Then they must be at High Wall Lodge. Thank you, sir. Can you tell me if High Wall Lodge is a comfortable place?"

"We are not permitted to speak of any of the houses on the mountain," said the man. "All I can say is that it depends greatly upon what you've been accustomed to. I've no fault to find."

"But would the children be happy there?" Esther persisted.

"I've no right to answer that question," said the man. "I should say if they were used to hard work they would n't mind. But Fare Well Palace is the place for me. I wanted to stop longer, but that's the worst of it; if you're agreeable to stay, it's fixed so you have to move on,— the laws, I mean,

— and if you want to leave, why, you generally can't; more than that it is not in my power to say. I'll maybe be getting myself into trouble for having said so much."

"Where do you live?" Esther asked.

"Down on the farther side of the mounting."

"Oh, in the town the peddler comes from?"

"No, the one next beyond."

As the man walked on, Esther made up her mind that she would go straight to High Wall Lodge.

"Poor children, they must be very unhappy," she thought. "They have never had to work hard in all their lives."

CHAPTER V

HIGH WALL LODGE

MEANWHILE the three children were hard at work at High Wall Lodge. The night of their arrival the old man had said to them, "You two boys can sleep in the loft; there are cots up there; and as for the little girl, there is a room next to the hall with the fire, so if she leaves the door open she can be very warm."

"First, can we have something to eat?" John asked.

"It is very inconvenient," the old man grumbled, and he went somewhat unwillingly to a closet and took out half a loaf of bread and some strawberry jam. He also brought three pewter tumblers filled with water.

"My servant has gone to bed like a sensible man. Eat and drink and get you off to bed quickly," he commanded, "and if you've got anything to say to each other, you'd better say it to-night," he told them mysteriously.

"Why?" asked John.

"Because you'd better. You'll find out why in the morning."

The fact that they were advised to talk made the two boys unusually silent. They fell asleep as soon as their heads touched their hay pillows. It seemed only a few moments, but it was really four o'clock in the morning, when the old man knocked loudly at the door of the loft.

"Get up, you sluggards," he called out; "the sun has been up for some time. He is going about his business and setting you an example of work."

"Do we have to get up with the sun?" John asked in dismay.

"Certainly. I gave you a little grace this morning. Up with the sun, work hard with the sun, and then to bed with the sun. That is the rule at High Wall Lodge."

"I wish we'd stayed at home," said John.

"Did any one make you come to the Enchanted Mountain?" asked the old man.

"No, sir."

"Did n't you want to come?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you complain? You are doing just what you wanted to do. Remember that, any time

you feel the work is too hard. Stop and think, 'This is precisely what I wanted to do.' That thought is refreshing to the mind. We'll have breakfast before we begin to work. Phoebe is helping my man set the table."

The servant looked even older than his master. They both seemed so old as to be ageless. It seemed as if they must have existed since the foundation of the world.

They had an excellent breakfast, and the children wondered how they could get such a variety on that lonely mountain top, for there were eggs and griddle cakes as well as broiled chicken.

"Now you can start in and work," said the old man, as soon as the meal was finished. He took them along a rough path, and when they had gone a short distance from the house he stopped.

"Do you see yonder wall?" he asked, as he pointed to an irregular, unfinished wall. Part of it was very, very high, almost as high as the church tower at home; some of it was as high as a house, and another portion was about eight feet high.

"Every one who comes here has to build a part of that wall," said the old man; "it is the law of the mountain. When the wall is finished it is to be as high as the highest part, and go all around High

Wall Lodge. You are so small you can start in with the new part and build it from the beginning."

There were many piles of stones scattered along the ground, and other stones that had not been taken out of it. The children saw some pickaxes and crow-bars and wheelbarrows.

"Those are for the strong men to use," said their host. "Many and many a man who comes here has to go down the mountain side and bring up a wheelbarrow full of rocks. You children can begin to build the wall now, and until you stop work for dinner not a single word can be spoken. That is the law, too. And if you disobey and speak, you must work five minutes longer for each word you say."

"How perfectly dreadful," exclaimed John.

"Quarter of an hour," said the old man. He had a piece of chalk in his hand, and he wrote the names of the three children on a huge blackboard that was near the wall, and under John's name he wrote, "Extra time, fifteen minutes."

"That is n't fair," objected Peter; "he did n't know we were to begin not to talk until we started in to work."

"You know now, anyway," said the old man, and under Peter's name he wrote, "One hour and thirty-five minutes."

"It is not fair," cried Phoebe indignantly.

The old man smiled at her, and he erased the figures from the blackboard.

"We'll start fair now," he told them.

"Thank you, sir," said Phoebe.

"Quarter of an hour," said the man, but he did not write it down. "I'll excuse you this time, since you meant to be polite. Now we'll begin. My task is to watch you and jot down the extra time you are to work. Each must build a certain portion of the wall. When he has completed his task he can go away, unless he has to work over time."

The old man sat down on a seat in a boulder near the blackboard, with the chalk in his hand, while the children ran off in different directions to get their stones. They did this so that they should have less temptation to talk.

"No, larger stones, larger ones, to begin with. The foundation must be strong," the old man called out. "You'll find you have the strength; it always comes when you need it."

Peter picked up a huge rock and staggered along under its weight. It was just as the old man had said; he was able to carry it.

"Phoebe can come and sit by me until you have placed the lower row of rocks for her," said the

man ; but Phoebe liked to work better than to sit still, and so she picked up a large stone and found that she could carry it quite easily. Presently the phoebe bird came and perched on the wall near her and encouraged her by singing, "Phoebe, phoebe, phoebe."

The view down into the valley was wonderful. Phoebe stopped several times to look at it. The mountain shelved off on that side, so there was almost a precipice below them, and she looked down on the tops of tall pines and feathery birches. There was a great stillness save for the wind in the branches and the cheerful phoebe bird.

The wonderful thing about the wall was that it grew so fast. In this magical mountain air they could work with great speed, and soon the wall was almost as high as they were.

Peter was the slowest, but he never dawdled ; while John, who was much quicker, stopped so often to rest, that at noontime Peter had more of the wall finished than he. Peter slowed up a little so that he and John might get through at the same time. Phoebe, being so small, had less of the wall to build. They were so hungry that in an unguarded moment John exclaimed under his breath, "I wonder when the old fellow will give us some dinner." He did

not think he could be heard, but there was no use in trying to cheat on the Enchanted Mountain.

“Fifty-five minutes,” said the old man, and he wrote it down on the blackboard. After a time he told them they might stop and go in to dinner.

They went to the stone hall, where the servant was stirring, with a long stick, a savory mess in a large stone jar. He ladled it with a long spoon and gave them each a heaping soup-plate full. The soup was made of chicken, and duck, and mutton, and parsley, and onion, and carrots, and turnips, all put in together, with several kinds of wild herbs, and it had a most delicious flavor; and the second course consisted of strawberry turnovers with flaky pie-crust. Each child had three of these little pies. The only drink at the meals was sparkling cold water from a spring near by. They were allowed to talk at meal-times, and this made it almost impossible not to keep on talking afterwards. Indeed, John forgot himself so far as to whisper to Peter, “Was n’t that a bully dinner?” and the old man chalked twenty-five minutes down on the blackboard.

They were getting along very well when the phoebe bird came and lighted on John’s head. He thought it was Peter, and he called out,

“Get out, don’t scratch me like that.”

“Thirty-five minutes,” said the old man, chalking it down on the blackboard.

“It’s you, is it, you little rascal,” John incautiously exclaimed to the phoebe bird, and thirty-five minutes more were added to his account.

John was not pleased at the prospect of staying two hours and a half longer than the others at High Wall Lodge, and he tried to make Peter talk; but Peter was too shrewd for him, so he turned his attention to Phoebe.

Now Phoebe was an impulsive little girl, and not at all cautious like her brother, so when John came around and said, “Talk, so I won’t have to stay alone,” and the old man chalked down forty more minutes, Phoebe felt so sorry for him that she looked at the blackboard to see how many minutes longer John was to stay. The record now amounted to three hours and ten minutes. Phoebe tried to calculate how long a sentence she must say, but she knew very little arithmetic.

“Dear John, I will stay with you, of course I will, I shall be perfectly delighted to,” she began, and watched the old man chalk the minutes down. She had to talk a great deal more to make up the amount, so she went on, “I love you very much, John, almost as much as I love Peter and Esther, and I will stay

with you with the greatest joy, of course I will, dear John."

She had now overrun John's time, and he was obliged to make up a sentence to match hers.

"You are a trump," he said, but six more words were needed, and he added, "I like girls who are kind."

Now Peter could not think of leaving his small sister in charge of so feather-brained a boy as John, so he had laboriously to make a sentence long enough to amount to four hours of time.

He could not think of anything he wanted to say, and at last he began, "Geography is a very pleasant study, especially when you study it by traveling around the wide world, and go to an enchanted mountain, which is not what it is cracked up to be; for we have to work so very, very hard, and I wish I was at—" He had now matched John's and Phoebe's time, so he stopped abruptly.

"At home," John could not resist saying.

"At home, at home," the others chimed in.

"Three cheers for home," John cried boldly.

"You are not allowed to cheer," the old man said.

"Why not?" John persisted recklessly, while the old man chalked down the minutes.

"If you cheer you'll find out why not. Disobedience is always punished on the mountain."

John did not relish the idea of punishment, but his curiosity was great, and so he gave a long and powerful cheer. Immediately there was a far-away echo, and at the sound the upper part of the wall he had built with such care began to shake, and finally, one stone after another tottered and then fell with a rumbling noise into the valley below. And the strange thing was that Peter's wall and Phoebe's remained firm.

John looked ruefully at his wall. It was now only about a foot high.

"Every cheer means that one must stay and rebuild his wall," said the old man. "It will take at least six hours of hard work."

John tried to make the others cheer, so that they would have to stay as long as he did, but the old man told him this would be of no use, for he would still have to stay six hours longer than they, by way of punishment for his disobedience.

Peter, who was a natural care-taker, was getting very much worried as to what the people at home were thinking. John and Phoebe, being younger, were irresponsible and care-free. When the shadows began to grow long and it became evident to Peter that he and Phoebe would have to spend another night on the mountain unless something were done,

he went over to the old man and began to talk in pantomime. He made a sign to show that he was very anxious to go down the mountain before the sun set.

"I know what you want to say," said the old man, "and I am sorry for you, but you should have thought of that before you came to the mountain. Every one who comes has to go to all three of the mountain homes before he can go home. If you don't talk, you and Phoebe will get through here early to-morrow."

"Not until then?" Phœbe cried in dismay, while the old man chalked down fifteen minutes.

"Not until then?" Peter echoed, so as to keep even with her.

It was impossible not to forget occasionally and say a few words, but by nightfall they had almost finished their part of the wall. At supper time this is the way the blackboard looked.

PETER GREEN JOHN DARLINGTON PHOEBE GREEN

Extra Time	Extra Time	Extra Time
Minutes	Minutes	Minutes
30	55	85
55	25	30
30	35	45
50	35	50

45	40	30
30	20	10
10	30	15
15	10	20
20	20	
285 = 4 hrs.	10	285 = 4 hrs. and 45 mins.
and 45 mins.	30	
	20	
	330 = 5 hrs. and 30 minutes.	

One cheer, 6 hrs. Total, 11 hrs. and 30 mins.

While they were eating their broiled chicken and preserved cherries they discussed their plans.

"In the morning we'll go on to Fare Well Palace," said Peter, "and wait for John there, if we can. I'll leave a note for Esther where the three roads meet, in case she comes in search of us."

"But supposing you can't wait for me at Fare Well Palace?"

"Then we'll wait for you at Nowork Castle," said Phoebe.

"But suppose you can't wait for me there?"

"Then we'll have to go home without you."

"I hate to be left here alone," said John.

CHAPTER VI

FARE WELL PALACE

ESTHER had started along the path that led to High Wall Lodge, when she saw a gray flannel shirt through the underbrush, and then she heard a familiar voice cry, "Don't go so fast, brother Peter, I can't keep up with you, and it's lonesome on the mountain."

How Esther's heart overflowed with joy! Presently Peter's kind face appeared, and behind him was little Phoebe, who clapped her hands when she saw Esther.

"Darling Esther, it is so good to see you," she cried, as she flung herself into Esther's arms and covered her cheeks with kisses.

"But where's John?" Esther asked.

"He had to stay behind for a punishment because—"

"We can't tell her why, something awful will happen if we tell our experiences," Peter reminded her. "Come along with us, Esther, to Fare Well Palace. We are going to wait for him there. He'll get there probably by night-time."

"No," said Esther firmly, "I must go and find John. I promised father and mother I'd take care of him."

"But he'll come along to-night," said Phoebe.

"She'll have to go to High Wall Lodge sometime," said Peter, "she may as well get through with it."

"Oh! Esther," said Phoebe, "it is so hard to see you, and then to have to say good-by."

"We'll see her safe to the Lodge, anyway," said Peter, and he and Phoebe walked back with Esther along the steep path.

They waited outside the Lodge and watched her disappear through the doorway. A moment later they heard a loud hurrah from John.

"He's forgotten and cheered because he's so glad to see Esther. How too bad! That will mean another six hours' work for him," said Peter. "Well, there is nothing for us to do but to go on to the Palace. I'm getting hungry. I wish I could have meals every two hours."

It was late in the afternoon when they reached Fare Well Palace, owing to their having turned back with Esther, and they were both of them tired with their long climb at the end of their morning's work.

The Palace was of white marble, and all the windows glittered like gold in the setting sun, but what

struck the children the most was a wonderful garden. It was impossible to enter it because it was fenced around by a high lattice, but they could look through the spaces and see the fruits and vegetables inside. There were many kinds that they had never seen before.

Peter went up to the great doors of the Palace and rang the bell. The doors were of bronze and covered with figures of all sorts of animals walking in a garden of fruit-trees. Presently the door opened in answer to Peter's ring, and a beautiful girl stood before them, with black hair and sparkling black eyes. She wore a flame-colored gown and had a string of coral beads around her neck.

"Come in, children, we have a welcome for you," she said.

"Oh, isn't this a wonderful great hall!" said Phoebe, while Peter stood awkwardly by, abashed at the sight of so much splendor.

"Can we talk all we like?" Phoebe asked.

"All you like."

"How perfectly lovely. Mother always said I was a chatterbox, and at High Wall Lodge—"

"We are not permitted to discuss the other houses," the girl said. "I suppose you two are very hungry. We shall have supper ready in half an hour."

We have several guests here, so maybe you will like to go to your room and change your dress before dinner," and she turned to Phoebe, who suddenly became conscious of her dirt-begrimed frock.

"You will find a fresh gown in the room," said the young lady, "and there will be a suit of clothes for you in the boys' quarters, Peter."

Phoebe was disappointed to find that she was quite at the other end of the Palace from Peter, but the kind young lady showed her to her room. On the outside of the door she read, "For girls from six to eight."

"You are the only little girl in the Palace at present," said the young lady, "so you can have your choice of all the frocks."

There were four little single beds in the room, and a closet containing a number of small dresses; some were of silk, and some of dimity or gingham, and others were woolen. Phoebe fingered the silk frocks with loving hands.

"Is it all right to wear a silk dress, seeing it is evening?" she asked, looking up with a very appealing smile. "I never had a silk dress in all my life. I have a white muslin one for parties, and a pink sash. I should love to wear that pink silk if I might."

"Anything you like," said the young lady.



Come in, children, we have a welcome for you

"Are you a fairy princess?" Phoebe asked presently. "And what is your name?"

"I am not exactly a fairy princess, only next door to it, and my name is Maud. You may call me Princess Maud, if you like."

Maud began to dress Phoebe in dainty underclothes, and then she put on the pink silk and tied her hair with a pink ribbon; finally she looked in the drawer of a chest and took out some pink silk stockings and pink slippers.

"Now you look like a fairy princess yourself," she said when she had finished dressing her.

Phoebe followed Maud down the shining staircase to the wainscoted hall, where Peter was waiting for her, dressed in a beautiful velvet suit.

"We will come into the dining-room now," said Maud. "Is there anything you children particularly like or dislike in the way of food?"

"I love ice-cream, and broiled chicken, and pie, and cranberries, and beefsteak, and potatoes, and almost everything," said Peter.

"And what do you dislike?"

"I never could bear Indian meal porridge, it's like chicken food, and I hate all kinds of shell fish, and I never have learned to like tomato; otherwise I'm not a bit particular."

“And how is it with you, Phoebe?”

“Mother says I’m the fussiest child about eating she ever saw,” Phoebe said confidently. “I don’t like oatmeal or any of the sensible things, but if I can have griddle cakes with syrup on them, and broiled chicken, and ice-cream, and fruit cake, and nice things like that, I don’t find a bit of fault.”

“All right, I’ll remember.”

It was so late that every one else had left the dining-room, and the children had their meal by themselves.

“To-morrow we will have an especial bill of fare for you,” said Princess Maud, “but to-night you can have what there is in the house.”

Peter and Phoebe were in the dining-room at an early hour the next morning, and they picked out a little table that was just large enough for two people, as the one where they would like to sit. There was a large bowl of wild roses in the centre of it.

Presently Princess Maud came into the dining-room.

“Can we sit here?” asked Phoebe, who was now dressed in a plain blue gingham.

“No, that table has been occupied by an old lady and her maid. The maid, however, got through a week ago and has gone on to Nowork Castle, but the old lady likes to sit there. She is a very difficult

case. She has been here five weeks, and she cannot learn to eat Indian porridge or tripe."

"But does she have to eat things she does n't like?" Peter asked.

"Certainly. That is what the Palace is for. To teach people to eat all the things they dislike most. I did not tell you last night, for I thought it might discourage you too much. Each guest has to stay until he learns to eat everything, and not only to eat it, but to like it. The old lady's maid was almost as fussy as the old lady. She would not eat baked beans. She said she had had them too often. And squash pie was another thing she hated, and prunes. But she got all through last week. She ate a fine big helping of baked beans, and two saucers of prunes, and a piece of squash pie the day she left. The old lady is so well now she really does not need a maid any more. People usually don't. They are better when they have to do things for themselves."

Princess Maud now placed them at the other table, where there was room for five more guests.

"There is a man next to you, Peter, who has been here three weeks learning to like hash and fish-balls," said Princess Maud. "And over on the other side of the table is a young girl who is struggling to like rye batter pudding. I have great sympathy with

her. I did not like it once. Sit down, children, breakfast will be ready in a moment."

Presently a neat maid came carrying a tray, and on it were a silver pitcher filled with thick cream and two silver porringers. One contained Indian meal porridge and the other oatmeal. She put the porridge in front of Peter and gave Phoebe the oatmeal.

"I can't eat it," said poor Phoebe, pushing it aside. "Mother says there's no use trying to make me eat things I don't like."

"All right," said Princess Maud, "but that's all the breakfast you are going to have this morning."

Phoebe jumped up from the table. "If that is all I can have, I don't want any breakfast," she said.

Peter was gulping down his Indian meal porridge after covering it with thick cream.

"You'd better eat your oatmeal, little girl," advised the young lady who was trying to like rye batter pudding. "If you eat it, you'll have something you like to eat as a reward."

"I never, never, will eat it. I'll starve first," Phoebe cried passionately. She began to sob. "Peter, you will have to go home without me, and you can tell father and mother how I died on the mountain,

and p'r'aps some day they will come up and visit my grave."

"I'll plant a cinnamon rose bush by your grave," said Princess Maud.

Phoebe looked up at her in surprise. She had expected sympathy and a good breakfast. However, she was not going to give in so easily, and she resolutely refused to touch the oatmeal.

When supper time came and Phoebe still refused to eat anything, having tasted nothing all day, every one in the palace was deeply interested.

"Don't you think you could try her on tripe?" asked the old lady who had just learned to eat it and was to start for Nowork Castle the next morning.

"She can have some of my hash and fish-balls," said the young man, who was to set forth with the old lady. "They really are not half bad. You have such a delicious way of making them."

"I will change with her and eat her oatmeal, and she can have my rye batter pudding," said the young lady who could not learn to like that dish.

"No," said Princess Maud firmly, "she has got to eat the oatmeal."

Phoebe, however, continued to refuse to taste it. The next day passed and she remained obstinate. This made two days that she had gone without food.

Peter, meanwhile, was eating the things he disliked most. He was so hungry that he could eat anything, but he did not like all the dishes.

Just before bedtime the second night Phoebe heard two familiar voices. "Oh, it's Esther and John," she cried in excitement; "how perfectly lovely."

Esther looked so gay and happy it was good to see her.

"I've had a fine time," she said. "The old man told me he had never had but one such worker, and that was a little girl who came to the mountain more than sixty years ago. Poor John had to stay over time, and so I talked just enough to keep even with him."

The four children were very glad to be reunited.

"Come into the dining-room and have something to eat," said Princess Maud. "To-night I will give you what we have in the house."

"Anything will do for me," said Esther. "I can eat everything."

"Everything?" Maud asked incredulously.

"Yes, everything. I used to stay with my grandmother a great deal when I was a little girl, and she made me eat everything. If you have some oatmeal and bread and butter, that will be all right for me, for we had a hearty supper before we started."

"Does John eat everything, too?"

"Oh, dear, no; but he is fond of oatmeal."

Princess Maud then confided to Esther the story of Phoebe and the oatmeal.

"Come on, Phoebe," said Esther, "don't be silly. We'll all three have a jolly supper of oatmeal and cream."

"I said I would never eat it, and I can't break my word."

"It's better to break your word than to break our hearts, and you would if you starved," said Esther.

By this time Phoebe was so famished that oatmeal tasted to her like the most delicious dish; broiled chicken could not be nicer.

"O Esther, I wish you did not like everything," she said, "for you will have to go in the morning, and there are lots and lots of things I have got to learn to eat."

"There are lots of things I don't like," John said consolingly. "We'll stick it out together."

"I have got to stay and take care of you, John. I promised father I would. Maybe there's something I've never tasted that I don't like," she added hopefully. "Anyway, I'm going to stay. They'll have to keep me, for I can't desert John."

CHAPTER VII

THE PARENTS

MR. and Mrs. Green were gone a week on their sketching trip. They felt entirely at ease about their children, as they were sure the Darlingtons were looking after them. They had gone away on a Tuesday morning, and the following Tuesday at sundown they reached home.

Everything was strangely silent around the place, and they concluded that the children were over at the Darlington's. They went quickly across the field to the other house.

"The garden is full of weeds," said Mr. Green. "I wonder what that means."

"It means that very little work is done when we go off," said Mrs. Green easily.

She was a small woman with quick, bird-like ways, and brown hair and eyes like Phoebe's. Indeed, in her short walking dress she looked hardly older than a little girl herself, as she trudged along by her tall husband. They were both of them easy-going people, who seldom worried. When they reached the Dar-

lingtons' house, however, and found the door locked, they began to think it a little strange.

"Probably they have all gone off on a picnic," said Mrs. Green.

They went home again, and this time they noticed that the Darlings' garden was full of weeds also.

The Greens found their own door locked, for Peter had taken the key away with him; but he had forgotten to shut one of the front windows.

Mrs. Green climbed in and discovered a number of letters that had been dropped in at the window. They were all of them from the Darlings, asking for news of their children. The latest was to Mr. Green, and it said, "Why in thunder don't you write?"

Mrs. Green sat down limply on the settle, as the tragic truth dawned on her.

"The Darlings must have gone away the morning we did," she said, "and they thought we were at home. Where on earth are the children?"

"Heaven only knows," said her husband, sinking into a chair.

"Peter, do you suppose they could have gone to the Enchanted Mountain?" she asked falteringly.

"That idea just crossed my brain," he confessed.

"We must go in search of them," said she. "But, oh, Peter, I am so tired with the journey."

“We will pass to-night in our own house,” said he. “Meantime I will go and scour the neighborhood. Perhaps they are merely taking tea with one of the children in the village.”

When he returned, the news he brought was most discouraging. The neighbors were all so far away that no one had seen the children, and it was not until Saturday afternoon that they were missed, when no child in either family came to Lucy Pearson’s birthday party, and every one was anxious to know what the trouble was; and the mystery only deepened when they found both houses closed and the gardens looking so deserted.

The Greens passed an anxious night, and the next day before starting for the mountain they wrote a long letter to the Darlings, but it crossed the Darlings on the way, as they had already started for home, bringing old Mrs. Crosby with them. When they reached home in the evening they found Esther’s letter.

“How terrible!” said Mrs. Darlington. “And the children have been gone a week. We must try to keep the truth from mother. It might be fatal to her in her weak condition. You must go after them to-morrow morning, Henry, and I will break the sad news to the Greens when they come home. Doubtless Mr.

Green will go after you. I will tell mother that the children have gone off for a little visit, and that you are going to bring them home."

And so the day after the Greens started, Mr. Darlington began his solitary journey to the mountain.

Mrs. Darlington kept the real state of the case from her mother for three days, but at the end of that time, when there was no word from the travelers, and when the Greens' letter had been forwarded to her saying that they had started for the Enchanted Mountain, she was so worried and nervous that the keen old lady knew that something was amiss.

"Now bless my soul, Mary," she said, "you can't keep me in the dark any longer. Something has happened to those children. What is it? Where has Henry gone? Why does he not write to you? What did that letter from the Greens say, that made you look so uneasy? Tell me everything. You don't want to worry me, but I'm most dead with worry already. Nothing is worse than suspense. Why, I have even imagined that those children have gone to the Enchanted Mountain."

"I'm afraid they have," said Mrs. Darlington, beginning to weep.

As she was a strong-minded woman who seldom cried, her mother knew how she was suffering.

"Don't worry, deary," she said. "They will come back some time. Why, my dear, I went to the Enchanted Mountain myself when I was a child."

"You, mother!"

"Yes, that is why I was always so particular that you should never go. We are not allowed to speak of our experiences, only to say we have been there, but I knew if I ever told you I had been there, you'd never rest satisfied until you went too. I know the shortest way; we will start to-morrow."

"But, mother," Mrs. Darlington gasped, "you are too old and feeble; you would die on the road."

"We will take it in easy stages," said Mrs. Crosby.

"Mother, is it so very awful?" Mrs. Darlington asked.

"I can't tell you more than this. A great deal depends on the way in which you meet it."

"That is like life," said Mrs. Darlington.

"It is not at all like life," snapped the old lady.

"And to think you went to the Enchanted Mountain all those years ago and never told me," said Mrs. Darlington. "How long were you gone?"

"I was gone just two weeks and one day. I made the shortest record of any one who ever went there. I was strong in those days."

“How long are people usually gone?”

“That depends. It’s partly character, but largely luck. Some are gone weeks, and others months, and some are gone years.”

“My poor, poor children,” said Mrs. Darlington.

“Esther will get on all right,” mused the old lady, “only she’ll have John on her hands. He will be a big handicap. I don’t see just how it will work out. Maybe it will be best for us to wait quietly here. Yes, maybe it will.”

“I feel that I must be doing something,” said Mrs. Darlington.

“So do I,” confessed the old lady; “and, Mary, don’t you tell any one, but you know I’ve had rather a monotonous time lately, and to go to the Enchanted Mountain would somehow be like renewing my youth.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWO ESTHERS

THE morning after Esther and John arrived at Fare Well Palace, the four children came down early to breakfast. Peter had not yet grown to like Indian meal porridge, although he ate it, but Phoebe was so enchanted with oatmeal that she was only allowed a small saucer of it, and was made to try rye porridge, which she disliked exceedingly. John was given brown bread brewis, a dish that he detested. As for Esther, she ate whatever was put before her, enjoying everything.

“I hope there is something that I have never tasted that I shall dislike,” she said to Princess Maud, “because I must stay as long as my brother does.”

Princess Maud brought out one thing after another for Esther to taste, grape nuts, Stilton cheese, persimmons, paté de foie gras, but she liked them all.

“I am afraid you will have to leave us to-day,” said Maud regretfully.

"Oh, but I can't. Father told me to take care of John. It doesn't seem fair to be punished just because I can eat everything," said Esther.

"No, it does n't," Maud admitted. "We've never had a case like this before. No one has ever been here who liked everything. I wonder if it is possible that you are a descendant of any one who has been here?"

"I don't think so," said Esther.

"Did n't your grandmother, perhaps, come here when she was a child?" Maud asked; "the one who taught you to eat everything?"

"I am sure she did n't. She would have told us if she had."

"Not necessarily. People who come here are not allowed to talk of their experiences when they go home, and if she had told you she had been here and could not tell you what happened to her, she would have been afraid of your starting for the mountain yourself."

"I never thought of that."

"What was your grandmother's name?"

"Esther, the same as mine."

"And the rest of it?"

"She is Mrs. Thaddeus Crosby. I don't see why she is n't Mrs. Esther Crosby, for my grandfather died a long time ago."

“What was her name before she was married?”

“Cutting,” said John. “Esther, don’t you remember the sampler she worked in silk, signed ‘Esther Cutting’?”

“How old is your grandmother?”

“I haven’t the least idea,” said Esther. “She is very tiny, and she likes to play with us children, but she wears white caps and she is a lot older than mother.”

“She is very, very old, I am sure,” said John.

“I will look over the old records,” said Princess Maud, “and if I can find an Esther Cutting who came here when she was a little girl, I will see if we can’t make an exception in your favor, Esther. It does not seem fair for you not to stay with John, if you have a grandmother who came here, because if she had not come, you would probably never have learned to eat everything. I am sure we shall find her name in the records.”

She took down a book from a high shelf where there were many similar volumes bound in calf-skin. This one bore some ancient dates on the back, in tarnished gilt letters. It covered a period of ten years, from sixty to seventy years in the past.

Princess Maud bent her pretty head over the musty volume and turned the yellow pages. The ink was

very faint, for the record was made so many years ago.

“Here she is, Esther — oh no, that is Esther Carter; she was fifty-two years old. ‘Thaddeus Crosby,’ that must be your grandfather, ‘fifteen years old and two months. Came from High Wall Lodge. Stayed four weeks and three days. Learned at last to eat pigs’ feet, and Indian meal porridge, bananas, olives, and pickled chives. Was an excellent weeder.’”

“Poor old chap, I’m sorry for him,” Peter said.

“Ah, here is your grandmother. They must have met on the mountain. I will read the record. Children, you ought to be proud of having such a grandmother. ‘Esther Cutting, thirteen years old and three months. Came alone to the mountain. Made the shortest time of any one who ever stayed at High Wall Lodge. When she came to Fare Well Palace she detested tripe, Indian pudding, rye porridge, and pork, but was determined to get through as quickly as possible, fearing her parents would be anxious about her. Bravely ate these dishes, and in a week regained her liberty and went on to Nowork Castle. A sweeter tempered child was never seen on the mountain. Wore by preference a homespun frock and became proficient in spinning and weaving.’”

"Did they have to work here in those days?" Phoebe asked.

"Certainly. You have to work now. There is no more spinning and weaving, but after the first two days we set the girls to doing light housework or sewing, and the boys to weeding, milking, or carpentering. We will start in with the light work to-day, varied by the games in which you are least proficient. First, I will go and ask Mother Martha if Esther can stay here."

She came back in a quarter of an hour, bringing word that on account of the fact that Esther's grandfather and grandmother had both visited the mountain, she could have the privilege of remaining ten days. If John had not learned to like everything at the end of that time, Esther would have to move on without him. Mother Martha hoped this might prove an incentive to him.

"Children, what work do you dislike most?" Princess Maud asked.

"Nothing can be worse than weeding gardens," said John.

"You are right there," said Peter.

"I hate dusting," said Phoebe.

"I don't like to sew," said Esther.

"Then I will set you to making one of the frocks.

I will cut it out, and you can sew on it while Phoebe dusts the room and the boys weed the gardens. After you have worked two hours we will play the game you all play the least well."

"Did grandfather and grandmother play games?"

"Yes, but we don't keep a record of the games."

"They must have played battledore and shuttlecock," said Esther. "Don't you remember how they played it together when we were little things?"

"That was before my day," said John. "I can't remember grandfather."

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE GRANDMOTHER

THE morning of the day that Mrs. Crosby and her daughter had intended to start for the Enchanted Mountain the poor little grandmother waked up with a terrible pain in her right heel.

“Mary,” she said, as she hopped about the room, “I can’t go to-day. Isn’t it disappointing? We shall have to wait until I am better.”

“Perhaps some of the family will come home to-day,” Mrs. Darlington said hopefully.

“I am afraid not. If they are at Nowork Castle there is no telling when —”

But as she uttered the words “Nowork Castle” the pain in her foot became so much worse that she sank down on the floor.

“Mary,” she said, “I ought to have known better than to mention one of the mountain places by name. To think I should have forgotten, after all these years. I learned the most valuable lessons of my life there, the most valuable,” she repeated, and as she spoke her pain began to ease up a little.

No one came home that day, or the next, or the day after, and still the pain kept on in Mrs. Crosby's foot. At the end of a week she felt well enough to start on her travels.

"It is August now," said Mrs. Crosby. "We ought to go at once. There are terrible snowstorms on the mountain; sometimes they begin in September; we must get home by September, so as not to get snowed in for the winter at Nowork —"

Once again she had a sharp twinge of her old pain that she thought was cured. "No doubt a winter on the mountain would be very comfortable," she hastened to add, and the pain began to feel easier. It prevented their starting that day, however.

When they finally were ready to go it was just two weeks and four days since the departure of the children, ten days since the Greens had set forth, and nine days since Mr. Darlington went, and still not one word had come from the travelers.

"I feel as if I should fly out of my skin if we don't go to-day," said the little grandmother. She looked very frail and tiny by the side of her tall daughter, who took things more calmly than she did, but who was getting very anxious herself.

"I am sure they are at —" began Mrs. Crosby.

"Now, mother, don't you mention the name of any of those mountain places," her daughter reminded her. "We shall never get off if you do."

"I am sure they are at peace, wherever they are," Mrs. Crosby finished virtuously. "Such good children ought to have happy times everywhere."

"So you think them good?" said Mrs. Darlington. "Well, Esther is. I am never anxious about her. Not being handsome myself I used to wish she were beautiful and fascinating, but at a time like this I am grateful to have her what she is. John is full of mischief, and so is Phoebe Green. I don't see why my husband and the Greens don't come back."

"I told you that they are probably stranded at — at some charming spot on the mountain, and as happy as the day is long," said the little grandmother.

"Mother, we must drive as far as we can," said Mrs. Darlington.

"But what could we do with a horse?" asked Mrs. Crosby.

"We can get a boy to drive us, and he can come back with the horse."

"No, he would be crazy to go all the way. No boy of spirit would turn back, once he had started for the Enchanted Mountain. Perhaps we can get a lift from some one who is going a part of the way."

And as she spoke they caught sight of a red cart in the distance. It was the peddler on his homeward way after making an extensive tour of the neighboring towns.

"Do you want to buy any tin ware or any wooden ware, or pins, needles, spools of thread, or pencils, ladies?" the peddler asked.

"No, but if you will let us drive with you for a part of the way we will take it very kind of you," said the little grandmother, and without waiting for his permission she scrambled into the cart.

"My! Is n't she spry!" said the peddler. "I hope I'll be as active at her age."

"It is because I went to the Enchanted Mountain in my youth," said the old lady. "Great place that."

"So I've heard," said the peddler. "I've a friend who went there; he was gone nigh on two years, and when he came back he said, 'Talk of work, gosh!' And again, 'Talk of food, gosh!' so I made up my mind to steer clear of the mountain. I used to try to get him to talk of those places, but he never would."

"He was a sensible man," said old Mrs. Crosby.

"Of course it is no affair of mine," said the peddler, turning to Mrs. Darlington, "but, mar'm, do you think your mother is fit to go?"

"She knows what is ahead of her, which is more than I do," said Mrs. Darlington, "and she wants to go."

"All right. Jump in, Mrs. Darlington. I never was one to grudge folks a ride in my cart."

"Now, if we are going to drive," said the little grandmother, "it will be best for us to keep on to the other side of the mountain; there's a short cut there that takes us straight to — to a very charming place. Don't I remember the morning your father showed me that short cut down the mountain; for he lived in a far-away town on the other side of it."

"My father?" said Mrs. Darlington.

"Yes, I don't think there can be any harm in my telling you that we first met on the mountain. Oh, my dear, such a shiny, golden day as it was when we started for home; a day in August when the mountain top was covered with pink wild roses, and clover, and blue bachelor's buttons, and scarlet poppies; and down in the valley there were brown-eyed daisies and goldenrod. Your father picked me such a beautiful bouquet. Big fluffy clouds were floating in the blue, blue sky, and a phoebe bird was singing."

"Listen, I hear one now," said Mrs. Darlington.

"I was thirteen and he was fifteen. We were

mere children," Mrs. Crosby continued. "He was a handsome boy. We did not see each other again for twelve years, but we never forgot each other. We were both so poor we were not married for three years more. I was teaching and he was away trying to make a fortune, and suddenly it came over both of us, what was the use of having been to the Enchanted Mountain if we could not do without — maybe I'd better not speak so plainly, I've a slight twinge of pain in my right foot."

"I can't imagine father as a handsome young boy," said Mrs. Darlington.

"You can't? Why, he was always a boy, to the end of his life; nothing but a grown-up boy. And handsome! He was handsome to the day of his death. Your Henry can't hold a candle to him."

The time passed pleasantly, for Mrs. Crosby kept up a flow of reminiscences. It was the middle of the afternoon when the peddler reached his home town, and left them at a modest wicket gate painted green, that opened on a path which led up the side of the Enchanted Mountain. It was in an out-of-the-way part of the country side, and few knew of it, but Mrs. Crosby had remembered it all these years.

"Mary, give me a hand," she said; "my knees are a little shaky after the long ride in the cart."

That's it! Oh, how good this mountain air is! I feel as if I were thirteen years old."

"Here are some brown-eyed daisies and some goldenrod," said Mrs. Darlington, as she stooped to pick a bunch of them for her mother.

"So there are," said Mrs. Crosby. "But they are not half so large and beautiful as they were when I was a girl."

After they had gone half-way up the mountain Mrs. Crosby said, "I wish I could see such wild roses, and bachelor's buttons, and scarlet poppies as we found then."

"Look, mother," said Mrs. Darlington.

The old lady looked and saw that the mountain slope ahead of them was blazing with red, blue, and pink flowers.

"I did n't notice them until just now," said Mrs. Darlington; "it almost seems as if your wishing for them brought them here; but of course that could n't be possible."

"Many things are possible that you have n't any idea of, Mary; you are so matter-of-fact. What we are looking for we are pretty sure to find."

"Then we'll surely find the children," said Mrs. Darlington.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ROAD TO NOWORK CASTLE

By the time that Esther's ten days at Fare Well Palace had come to an end, Peter and Phoebe had learned to eat everything ; but although John now liked most things, he said he could not learn to like rye porridge or pigs' feet. Esther felt very badly to think that she must desert him, but there was nothing else to be done, for Mother Martha could not be persuaded to extend her time. Every one else had moved on, either to High Wall Lodge or to Nowork Castle, except the young lady who was still struggling with rye batter pudding. She promised to look after John, and so did Princess Maud.

They had a mournful parting with John, who gulped down his tears.

"It seems very hard that I should have to leave him after all," said Esther.

"It is n't fair," said John ; "father told you to take care of me."

"I wish I could," said Esther.

"It is his own fault," said Princess Maud.

Esther, Peter, and Phoebe had a rough scramble to the place where the three roads met, and were just starting on the path which led to Nowork Castle, when they saw a familiar figure coming along the road from High Wall Lodge.

“Father!” Esther exclaimed.

It was indeed Mr. Darlington, who had completed his time at High Wall Lodge.

“My dear Esther, you precious child,” he cried, “how glad I am to see you. You are on your way to Nowork Castle, I see. So am I. What luck this is! We will go there together. How do you do, Peter? How are you, Phoebe? But where is John?”

They all sat down on a fallen tree-trunk while Esther poured forth her story breathlessly. She was careful not to go into too much detail, lest some awful fate should overtake her.

Mr. Darlington listened with absorbed attention.

“Father,” said Esther, “it would be splendid to have you at Nowork Castle, but there are three of us, and poor John is so lonely at Fare Well Palace. I think you’d better go straight to him. You and he can come after us as soon as you can. Maybe you can make him learn to like — oh, how my head aches. What is the matter? I didn’t think just saying that much would be any harm.”

It was very hard for Mr. Darlington to part from his daughter, but he realized that her advice was good.

When the children came near Nowork Castle they were all of them delighted with its great stone towers and picturesque battlements. Peter gave three resounding raps with the griffin, and at the sound the whole castle seemed to wake up. There was a noise as if people were jumping on floors, and a hurrying and scurrying here and there. Presently the beautiful golden-haired lady looked out of a small latticed window at one side of the door.

"I am sorry to keep you waiting," she said, "but there are other guests who must go before you can come in. Amuse yourselves in the garden, children, for an hour. When all the preparations are made for you, the castle bell will be rung. When you hear it you can come to the door again. The garden is at the back of the house."

The children thought this was the most beautiful garden they had ever seen. It was full of poppies, big white double ones, scarlet ones, and pink ones with curly petals. It was surrounded by a low wall. Three sleepy looking cats were lying on the wall; one was jet black, another snow white, and a third was bright yellow. The only other live things to be

seen were a pair of owls, who were in a neighboring tree, and a phoebe bird, who called out Phoebe's name in a faint voice.

"How very sleepy everything looks here," said Peter.

"They won't make us work, that's certain," said Phoebe. "Nothing seems to be working. I am sure the name means No Work. Won't it be fun to have a rest, for a change?"

Phoebe promptly tried to make friends with the black pussy, while Peter went up to the yellow cat, and Esther softly stroked the white one, but they could not make these sleepy cats play. They walked away from the children with dignity and settled down for a nap on the farther side of the wall.

At last, an hour later, the castle bell pealed out and the children ran to the front door. As it slowly opened they saw, to their amazement, Mr. and Mrs. Green walk out.

"Oh, mother! Oh, father!" their children exclaimed ecstatically.

Mrs. Green and Phoebe flung their arms about each other's necks, and laughed and cried.

Mr. Green and Peter took things more calmly.

"Hullo, father," said Peter.

"Glad to see you, old chap," said Mr. Green.

Behind the Greens were the old lady who had learned to eat tripe at Fare Well Palace, and her maid, and the hash-and-fishballs young man. There was also a little girl about Esther's age.

"Oh, mother, can't you and father come back to the castle?" asked Phoebe.

"Alas, no. We have to move on. It is the law. We are going to High Wall Lodge."

"And can't you come back?" Phoebe asked the little girl.

She shook her head.

It seemed tragic to the Greens to have to part, but as the children could not leave the mountain without staying at Nowork Castle, and the Greens had to visit High Wall Lodge and Fare Well Palace, there was nothing else to be done.

Mrs. Green kissed her little daughter over and over again.

"Oh, my children," she said, "what bliss it will be when we are all together once more."

Then the door opened and Mrs. Green saw her two children and Esther disappear into the castle.

"I wonder how they will stand the ordeal," said she.

CHAPTER XI

MR. DARLINGTON

MR. DARLINGTON went quickly along the path to Fare Well Palace, whistling a gay little tune. He felt pride in his daughter, for the old man at High Wall Lodge had told him how well she had done, and now that he had seen for himself that Esther was in blooming health, and heard that John was at Fare Well Palace, even the thought of his wife waiting for them anxiously at home hardly dampened his high spirits.

“We’ll get back to Mary very soon,” he told himself.

When Mr. Darlington reached the palace, there was a glad meeting between father and son, and at supper time they sat down together at the table with the only remaining guest.

John was trying to like pigs’ feet.

“A delicious dish,” his father told him. “You ought not to make such a fuss about what you have to eat. I hope they will give me some. And what are you eating?” he asked the young lady.

“Rye batter pudding, sir.”

“Excellent, that is my favorite dessert. I used to have it when I was a boy. I don’t get it very often now, for my wife and John are n’t fond of it. Bring me some pigs’ feet to begin with, and then some rye batter pudding.”

Princess Maud returned presently with the pigs’ feet and some delicate rolls and a small pat of butter. She put them down in front of Mr. Darlington.

“Take that butter away,” he said. “I dislike butter exceedingly.”

“I beg your pardon, sir, but you will have to learn to like butter before you leave us.”

“That is perfect nonsense, my girl,” said Mr. Darlington.

“Father, she’s a princess,” John whispered.

“I don’t care who she is. It’s nonsense to expect a man who has never eaten butter to begin at this late day,” he added, turning to Princess Maud. “Why, if I’ve got to stay until I learn to like it, you’ll have me with you for the rest of my life, and I’m a very expensive boarder.”

John began to giggle.

“What are you laughing at?” said Mr. Darlington.

"You ought to be ashamed to make such a fuss about what you have to eat," mimicked John.

"Now you need n't be saucy; that is downright impudence. It is an entirely different matter. Children ought to eat everything, but to expect a man of forty to eat butter, when he has never tasted it, is absurd. Absurd, I tell you," and he brought his fist down hard on the table. "Rye batter pudding and some apple pie, if you have it, will do very well for dessert. Bring me some cream, please, to eat with these rolls."

"All right, sir," said Princess Maud.

"Father, you'll never get away if you go on like this," said John. He was looking at his father with round, astonished eyes.

"I shall go on as I please, John; I always have. Do you suppose your mother would tell me what I must eat? Where is the apple pie?" he asked Princess Maud, as she came back with the pitcher of cream and the rye batter pudding.

"It has butter in the crust, sir, and so of course you would n't eat it."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Darlington.

"You are awfully lucky, father, in being allowed to eat things. I suppose it's because you are grown

up. Princess Maud would n't let Phoebe eat anything until she had tasted oatmeal."

Meanwhile the young lady had finished the last mouthful of her rye batter pudding, but made up a little face as she did so.

"Bravo," cried Princess Maud, "you will soon learn to like it. Now you can choose what else you will have for supper."

As the days passed, and John grew to like pigs' feet and was beginning to eat rye porridge, Mr. Darlington foresaw that he soon would be left behind at Fare Well Palace unless he changed his ways. He had always ruled every one in his own household and all his neighbors, and he did not mean to eat butter at the bidding of a chit of a princess. And yet if he did not eat it, what would happen? He did not like the idea of years spent on this lonely mountain top, away from all his family and friends.

Day after day Princess Maud set the pat of butter down before him, and day after day he pushed it aside. Finally, both John and the young lady had learned to like everything, and still Mr. Darlington remained obstinate.

"Are you going to let your son go away without you to-morrow?" Princess Maud asked.

"I shall have to unless you let me go with him. How could I learn to like butter in twenty-four hours?"

"Father, do taste a teenty-weenty piece. Shut up your eyes and make believe it's cheese."

"But it is n't cheese," said Mr. Darlington.

"It's a lot nicer."

"It tastes more like cream," said Princess Maud. "Let me spread a very small piece on your roll."

"No," said Mr. Darlington, "if I decide to eat it I can spread it on for myself, thank you."

"Think of all the good things that have butter in them that you have n't been eating lately," said Princess Maud. "Remember how flat you thought the beefsteak tasted because it did n't have butter on it, and how you've had to give up pudding sauce and apple pie."

"And oh, father," said John, "what shall I do without you? It will be so lonely on the mountain."

"This young lady will look after you."

"I can't, sir. I came up the mountain from the other side, and I began at Nowork Castle. I am going on to High Wall Lodge."

"It just means this, father," said John, "you care more about what you have to eat than you do about me."

“John!” said his father.

But he thought about the saying for a long time, and at supper he suddenly put out his hand and spread a roll with butter.

As he tasted it a slow smile overspread his face.

“It tastes like apple pie, and pudding sauce, and lots of other good things,” he said. “I never tasted it before. I never knew it tasted like this. Dear me! How much I’ve missed for forty years.”

CHAPTER XII

NOWORK CASTLE

MEANWHILE the children at Nowork Castle were having a long rest. On the night of their arrival the golden-haired lady said, —

“I suppose you are all of you tired, so as soon as you have had your supper I will show you to your beds.”

“Are you a princess, like Princess Maud at Fare Well Palace?” asked Phoebe.

“My name is Ethel, but you may call me Princess Ethel if you like, and here is my brother Rupert, he will show Peter to his room.”

Peter was at one end of the castle, in a big room shared by Prince Rupert, while Esther and Phoebe had a large room to themselves. There were four beds in it, each more splendid than the other. The bedsteads were made of gold, and they had magnificent canopies. That on Esther's bed was cloth of gold embroidered with red pomegranates, with a quilt of the same, and Phoebe's was cloth of silver embroidered with blue irises.

"Oh, how pretty," said Phoebe. "And can we stay in bed as long as we like in the morning?"

Princess Ethel gave a strange little smile.

"You most certainly can," she said.

"I never felt anything so comfortable as this bed," said Phoebe drowsily, as she sank into it.

"There never was anything so comfortable," said Princess Ethel. "The mattresses are stuffed with rose leaves. Do you notice the delicious fragrance?"

The sun was high in the heavens when Phoebe woke the next morning. "Isn't it good not to have to get up?" she asked.

She saw that Esther was sitting up in bed.

"I don't like it at all," said Esther. "I've been trying to get up for the last hour. Do you notice the golden netting that is over the beds? They must have put it down after we went to sleep. I suppose it is meant for a mosquito netting, but I can't move it."

Phoebe found she had a similar screen around her bed.

"Let's shout, and maybe some one will come," she said.

"I did n't like to make a noise, for fear of waking you," said Esther.

"Hullo, hullo," cried Phoebe. "We are ready to get up."

But no one came.

"Here's a bell," said Esther. "How stupid I was not to see it before."

She pressed the button and presently Princess Ethel glided into the room.

"We are ready to get up now," said Esther.

Princess Ethel smiled her peculiar smile. "I did not tell you last night, children, for fear it might discourage you, that you can't get up so long as you stay in the castle. It is a place for rest, not for work."

"And how long shall we have to stay here?" Phoebe cried in dismay.

"We plan to have six guests at a time. When the number is complete and other guests arrive, we let the six out."

"So if no one comes for weeks we shall have to stay here for weeks?" asked Phoebe.

"Just so," said Princess Ethel.

"But if Mr. Darlington and John come, and one other person, that will make six," said Esther, "and then the next time somebody comes we can all go home, can't we?"

"Yes," said Princess Ethel. "Meanwhile you had better make the most of your rest while you have it. Remember how you have always wanted to be idle. This is a chance that may never come to you again."

"I hope it never will," said Phoebe.

"I have never wanted to be idle," said Esther.

"I'd a lot rather be doing something."

"Oh, there is something to do. You will have good things to eat, and be bathed in perfumed water, and wear flowing embroidered nightgowns, and colored gowns by day. I will bring you a number of wrappers to choose from."

"It won't be so bad for a while," said Phoebe; "it will be fun to have our breakfast in bed."

"I think it will be perfectly horrid," said Esther.

"Can't we read or sew?" she asked.

"For the first three days we require absolute rest; after that you are allowed to read or sew for an hour, and we gradually increase the time."

"We can talk, can't we?" asked Phoebe.

"Yes, you can talk."

The hours of the first days dragged slowly. By noontime Phoebe felt as if she were in a prison; by four o'clock in the afternoon she felt, as she told Esther, as if she should "fly out of her skin" if she could not get up. By five o'clock she said, "I'd just love to weed a garden, would n't you, Esther?"

"I'd even like to sew," Esther confessed.

The second day was worse, for the children were talked out. There seemed nothing left to say.

On the morning of the third day Princess Ethel said, "I am going to pull up the golden netting, children. You have been so good that I shall put you on your honor, and leave all bolts and bars undone, for I know I can trust you."

The third day was still harder than the other two, for to be able to get out of bed, yet not allowed to, was most trying. That night Phoebe lay awake for a long time after Esther had gone to sleep, and she thought, "I did n't promise not to run away. But it would be perfectly awful to do it, when Princess Ethel has put me on my honor."

The moonlight came in at the window, making a silver patch of light on the floor.

"Father and mother may have got through at the Lodge and may be at Fare Well Palace," she thought. "I know my way to Fare Well Palace; I could go there alone, and I should n't mind staying at Fare Well Palace with them a bit, it's a fine place. I should n't even mind High Wall Lodge. There are worse things than hard work. Suppose I should be punished? But they would never find out I had gone until to-morrow morning, and by that time I should be safe at Fare Well Palace. The moon is so bright I could see my way as plain as if it were day. I just hate, hate, hate staying in bed, and I should love to

be with father and mother. It is rather mean to leave Esther, but if I were to tell her, she would n't go, or let me go. Maybe some nice person will come along to-morrow and be company for her. But how can I go in an embroidered nightgown? I wonder what Princess Ethel did with our clothes?"

She looked around the room and saw a door that she thought might be the door of a closet. There could surely be no harm in getting up softly, oh, so softly, to see if it were a closet door, and if her clothes were in the closet. If something awful happened, if she had a terrible pain in her heel as soon as she touched the floor, she would scramble back into bed again and give up the attempt.

She jumped lightly out of bed, and softly, oh, so softly, glided across the bare floor. She turned the knob gently and pulled the door open. Yes, it was a closet, and there were all her clothes and Esther's, hanging on the pegs.

She dressed noiselessly. Now that nothing had happened she began to feel as if she were doing right in leaving the castle. She did not think of it now as running away, but as going on a little journey to join her father and mother, who must have missed her very much. For was she not their baby? If she could have been with Peter she might have felt dif-

ferently, but Peter was at the other end of the castle.

She walked across the bare floor with her shoes in her hand. Yes, the door was unbolted, Princess Ethel had kept her word. She swung open the heavy door and ran noiselessly along the corridor. She paused at the top of the flight of marble stairs, for she heard a sound. It seemed to be the creaking of a door. Yes, and here were quick footsteps coming along the passage-way. She scrambled up on a niche and hid behind a statue that stood there. Then the footsteps ceased, for the other person had evidently heard her. The moonlight shone in a great silver patch on the marble stairway. Presently the muffled sound of footsteps began again, and a moment later a figure went stealthily down the stairs. As it passed her she recognized her brother.

“Peter!” she cried breathlessly.

“You here, Phoebe?” he whispered back.

“Yes. O Peter, now we can go together.”

Together they went down the marble staircase, pausing when they reached the heavy front door. Alas! the bolts would not yield at Peter’s touch. The children looked at each other in dismay.

“She said she would leave all the bolts and bars undone, because she trusted us,” said Phoebe.

“Yes, that’s what Prince Rupert told me.”

"I should think they might have trusted us better than this," said little Phoebe.

"I guess they knew they could n't, and I guess they were about right," said Peter gloomily.

"Suppose we try the back door, the one that leads into the garden," suggested Phoebe. "I just can't give up."

Noiselessly they crossed the great hall, and Peter began to fumble with the bolts. "They've left this door unlocked," he said. He swung back the great door and stepped out on the stone flagging, followed by Phoebe. With a sigh of relief they closed the door behind them. Phoebe looked up and noticed that the three cats were lying on the wall and the owls were in the trees. The phoebe bird, too, was in its accustomed place.

The children sat down on the steps to put on their shoes, for the path ahead of them was very rough; then, hand in hand, they went through the wicket gate and stood outside the wall.

"Bravo!" said Peter. "We are free! I'm sure they can't get us now."

He had just finished speaking when the cats awoke, and so did the owls and the phoebe bird. The three cats gave the most ear-splitting and piercing mews.

"Miaou, miaou, miaou."

The noise seemed to go down the mountain side and be caught by an echo which gave back the sound dozens of times, the final miaous being blurred and running together as if an army of cats were mewling.

"They are enchanted cats," cried Peter. "No mortal cat could mew that way."

"But it is the echo that makes it sound so strange. They don't seem to have watch dogs here, these must be watch cats. Run, Peter, run for your life! for they will come after us."

As the children ran breathlessly along the path, the owls began to hoot, and the echo caught up the sound until it seemed as if a hundred owls were hooting in the forest.

"To whit, to whit, to whoo. Who are you?" they seemed to say, and the phoebe bird answered the question, "Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe," and the mountain side echoed the sound until it seemed as if a phoebe bird were perched on every tree.

At the sound of the phoebe bird the door of the castle swung open and two figures came out, Prince Rupert and his sister, the Princess Ethel.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTERWARDS

“My dear Phoebe, how did you ever happen to do it when I trusted you so?” asked Princess Ethel, as she took the shrinking little figure in her arms.

“Because — because I wanted to be free. I wanted to go to father and mother.”

“But you will have to work, as soon as you get home.”

“I shan’t mind that,” said Phoebe.

“Did you think you would get home sooner for being disobedient?” Prince Rupert was asking Peter.

Before he could answer, the cats began to mew again, and the owls to hoot, while the phoebe bird again gave her musical call, and once more it seemed as if the valley below were filled with hundreds of cats, and myriads of owls and phoebe birds.

“Who is coming here at this time of night?” asked Prince Rupert.

“The watch cats and the owls always tell us when any guest tries to leave or to come by night,” said Princess Ethel.

"And the phoebe bird," said Phoebe.

"The phoebe bird is not here all the time. She has been following you children about."

The moonlight fell strongly on two figures, that of a tall woman and a little, frail one leaning against her.

"Why, it is Mrs. Darlington and old Mrs. Crosby," said Phoebe, and there was a glad meeting.

"We meant to arrive in good season," said the old lady faintly. "I know your rules and your hours, but I turned my ankle and we have been all this time coming over the rough path. We meant to spend the night outside, only when I heard the cats and the owls, I knew some one must be leaving, so we knew you would not mind giving us shelter."

"Mind it!" cried Princess Ethel. "We are proud to shelter one of your age. You have evidently been here before?"

"Yes, when I was a little girl, more than sixty years ago. The place has changed very little in all those years."

"Can you possibly be the little girl my mother used to tell me about, the brave child who started up the mountain in pursuit of one of her father's cows? and then got caught by the night and wandered up here to beg for shelter?"

"Yes, that was I."

"Mother said there never was such a visitor; that you just made light of everything, and said if you had to stay in bed you were going to get as much fun out of it as you could."

The old lady's eyes twinkled. "I'll say the same now. Dear me, a few days in bed will seem restful after my long scramble, and set me up. I did n't like bed when I was young, but our point of view changes. I thought it was wiser to begin at this end of the mountain so as to be sure of a good rest before going on to High—"

"Mother," her daughter warned her.

"You can mention names once you are inside one of the mountain houses," her mother said. "How many guests are here now?"

"These two children and Esther Darlington."

"Esther? That is indeed good to hear, but where is John?"

"He is at Fare Well Palace, I believe."

Again the old lady's eyes twinkled mischievously. "I don't doubt it," she said. "Maybe he'll wish he'd taken my advice times he stayed with me. Maybe Esther's glad she took it."

Princess Ethel took the ladies and Phoebe upstairs.

Mrs. Crosby had one of the vacant beds in the

children's room and Mrs. Darlington the other. Mrs. Crosby's bed was the most beautiful of all, for the canopy was a pale, shimmering green with yellow and white lilies embroidered on it. Some of the lilies were gold and some were silver. Mrs. Darlington's canopy and bed-quilt had bunches of purple grapes embroidered on a background of gold.

"Please, can I have the golden netting down?" asked Mrs. Crosby. "I want everything to be just as it was when I was a child."

Meanwhile Phoebe had jumped into bed. She hoped in the general excitement she would be forgotten, and that there would be no punishment for her.

"I am an old woman," said Mrs. Crosby to Ethel, as she pulled the golden netting down, "so maybe you'll give me the old woman's privilege of asking a few questions."

"You may ask all the questions you like," said Princess Ethel, "and I will answer all our rules will let me answer."

"Do you know where my son-in-law is, Henry Darlington?"

"He was on the road to Fare Well Palace to meet John the last we heard of him."

"And he has to come here with John?"

"Yes."

"And where are the Greens?"

"They left here the night the children came, and were planning to go to High Wall Lodge."

The old lady put her hand to her head. "I am trying to work it out, but I never was good at arithmetic," said she.

"You are trying to work what out, mother?" asked Mrs. Darlington.

"I am trying to work out how we can ever all of us get home. It is easy enough for the Greens, who are through here; that is only a matter of time; but how on earth are we all going to get home? There are five of us here now. When John and his father come that will make seven; then, as you never take seven, one of us will have to move on."

"That will be Esther," said Princess Ethel. "Peter and Phoebe will have to stay a fortnight longer than Esther as a punishment for their disobedience."

Mrs. Crosby did not seem greatly interested in the fate of Peter and Phoebe. They were not her grandchildren.

"Then by and by there will be three at home," said Mrs. Crosby, "Mr. and Mrs. Green and my Esther. It is getting so late in the season it is quite

possible that no one else will come up here until the spring, so that we may have to stay here all winter."

"That is quite possible," said Princess Ethel. "And you may have to stay longer yet, for we sometimes have an off year, when no one comes."

"How perfectly terrible!" said Phoebe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETURN

"SHALL I have to go home all alone?" Esther asked the princess. "That does not seem fair when I've obeyed the rules."

"No, you can go to High Wall Lodge, or to Fare Well Palace, and wait until the Greens are ready to go home with you. You are one of the few to win the Enchanted Mountain Medal."

"What is that?"

Princess Ethel went to a cupboard where they kept the records that were similar to those at Fare Well Palace, and she took out a box made of gold, standing on four golden claw feet. She opened the box with a gilt key and took out a gold medal. On it was engraved, "This is to certify that" (there was a blank left for the name) "has stood all the Enchanted Mountain tests, and therefore is entitled to be a guest at any of the houses without being compelled to visit the others."

"I will have your name engraved in red letters," said Princess Ethel, "and all you will have to do is

to show your medal at either house, and they will welcome you gladly."

"It is just like my medal," said old Mrs. Crosby, "only my name is engraved in blue letters. I had forgotten I didn't have to go to all of the houses this time. Isn't it great to have a descendant who has won a medal? I brought mine along with me, but I didn't dare to show it to my daughter, as I was afraid that might be against the rules."

It was not many days before Mr. Darlington and John came to Nowork Castle and Esther was released. It was very tantalizing to have to say "How do you do?" and "Good-by" to them, all in one breath.

As Esther went through the garden the poppies were even more beautiful than when she first came, for they were larger and there were more of them. Thousands of huge, red poppies and quantities of pink ones with curly edges, and myriads of double white ones held up their blossoms as if they loved to watch Esther pass.

"How beautiful the garden is," said Esther. "When I get home I am going to make our garden more lovely than it has ever been before."

The cats came along the wall with blinking, sleepy eyes, and held up their heads to be stroked. The



She proudly showed her medal

white one came first and was followed by the black pussy, and the yellow cat came last of all. The owls nodded a good-by to her and the phoebe bird called "phoebe" once in a sleepy voice.

When Esther reached Fare Well Palace she found the Greens had not yet come, so, after spending the night there she went on to High Wall Lodge.

When the old man opened the door to her, she proudly showed her medal. His face was wreathed in smiles.

"Esther, I'm glad to see you," he said. "You'll find friends here, Mr. and Mrs. Green. As you have a medal you won't have to work. You can sit with me and watch them. They've stayed with us longer than most, for they can't help talking to each other. They are crazy over the scenery, and keep saying they wish they'd brought their sketch books. Dinner is just ready, so you can talk to them."

The Greens were delighted to see Esther and to hear all that she was permitted to tell them about their children.

"We have had to work off a great deal of extra time," said Mrs. Green. "I never realized before what talkers we both were; but we've got it down now to six hours and twenty-five minutes, so we ought to get through to-night or early to-morrow morning."

"Can't I help them?" asked Esther of the old man. "If you'll only let me, they can surely get through to-night, and we can go on to Fare Well Palace early in the morning."

The old man paused to think. "Yes," he said at length slowly, "seeing as you have won the Enchanted Mountain Medal you may help them if you like."

And so it happened that the Greens and Esther went on the next day to Fare Well Palace, where they were detained a little over a week, for Mrs. Green had a rooted aversion to lobsters and Mr. Green disliked all salads. Finally, Mrs. Green and Esther went home alone, but Mr. Green joined them after a few days.

The Greens settled down in their cottage, the Pod, and took Esther to live with them until her father and mother, and John, and their own children, should return. Every one came to see them, and all in the village were most anxious to hear their adventures, and were disappointed that these could not be told. No one cared to attempt the journey to the Enchanted Mountain, however, for the Greens had been gone too long to tempt others to make the trip.

And so summer gave place to autumn, and still the travelers did not return.

"I am afraid they will be snowed in for the winter," said Esther anxiously one day. "There is snow on top of the mountain this morning."

"I am terribly worried," Mrs. Green confessed. "I am afraid it is an off year, and no one else will go there."

"I have just been thinking," said Mr. Green with an effort, "that I ought to go up there before the road is impassable, and set the others free."

"But, Peter, how terrible it would be for you to be there alone," cried Mrs. Green; "and it might be an off year."

"I know it, dear, but what does the happiness and welfare of one man count for, when compared to the comfort of six people?"

"It is very heroic of you, Peter," said his wife, "but suppose the roads should already be impassable? Suppose you failed to get there and they did not come back, either? And then it seems a little late in the season for Mrs. Crosby to take the trip, and Mrs. Darlington still has to go to Fare Well Palace and High Wall Lodge."

"If one goes we had better all go together," said Esther. "My Enchanted Mountain Medal will make us sure not to come to any harm. If we three get there the six others can come out, and then if three

other people don't come, some more of us can go up, and so on. There will always have to be some of us there until the happy day when somebody else comes up. It is hard, but not so bad as some things."

"We can pretend that we are going to a winter resort for our own pleasure," said Mrs. Green, who always looked on the bright side. "Many people do travel merely for pleasure."

"We may as well face this thing squarely," said her husband. "There is no pleasure about it. We are in an awful fix. The problem is, how shall we ever all get reunited?"

Suddenly Esther had a bright idea. "If only we could find somebody who really wanted to go back to the Enchanted Mountain," she said. "Then he could go and set the others free. I am sure Princess Ethel would let the rest of them go on to Fare Well Palace and High Wall Lodge with mother. She would n't keep them waiting long, for she eats almost everything and she is a splendid worker."

"Who would ever want to go back?" asked Mr. Green gloomily.

"I met a man when I was on the mountain," said Esther. "He seemed to be very poor, and to have worked hard all his life. He told me how he wished he could stay longer. Maybe we can find him."

"What was his name, and where did he come from?" asked Mr. Green eagerly.

"I don't know his name, but he came from the town beyond the peddler's town, and he had a beautiful collie dog. I should know the dog and his master anywhere."

"We will hunt for them this very day," said Mr. Green joyously. "We will all three drive over together, that nothing may separate us."

And so, on this glorious autumn morning the three of them took the long drive to the other side of the mountain. In the town there were several men who owned collie dogs, but at last they came to a little tumble-down shanty and there they found the man and his beautiful dog.

When he saw Esther he greeted her eagerly.

"So you had to come back, too," he said. "My, but it is enough to brighten all of my life, just to remember the good times I had on that mountain. Plenty of work and the strength to do it, and such good things to eat. Why, the only trouble was that I liked everything except persimmons and pâté de foie gras, and unfortunately I soon got to like those. But as for those beds! It was so good, — the rest, after the hard work."

"Would you like to go back?" asked Esther.

"Would you like to stay at — I suppose I mustn't speak the name. Would you like to have more rest in that place?"

"Oh, yes, I'd like to."

"Then why don't you go?"

"Maybe I will, next spring."

Esther took out her Enchanted Mountain Medal. "Take this with you," she said, "and nothing can harm you. Tell them at — at the place where one rests — that Esther Darlington sent you. Some of my family are there who want to come home. Do you mind if you have to stay a whole year?"

"Mind?" said the man. "There'd be no such good luck for me."

Nine days later, as Esther and Mrs. Green were sewing, Esther suddenly gave a little cry. "They are coming, they are coming," she said.

The little procession walked slowly along. Mr. Darlington and Peter had made a chair of their arms and were carrying Mrs. Crosby, while Mrs. Darlington had Phoebe by one hand and John by the other.

And oh, the happiness of the two families in being together again!

"I want to show you the garden," said Esther, after they had talked for a long time. "It is getting

a little late in the season, but the dahlias and chrysanthemums are fine."

"We have never had such a garden before," said Mrs. Darlington.

"I did all the weeding myself," said Esther proudly. "And look, mother, at my new frock. I made part of it."

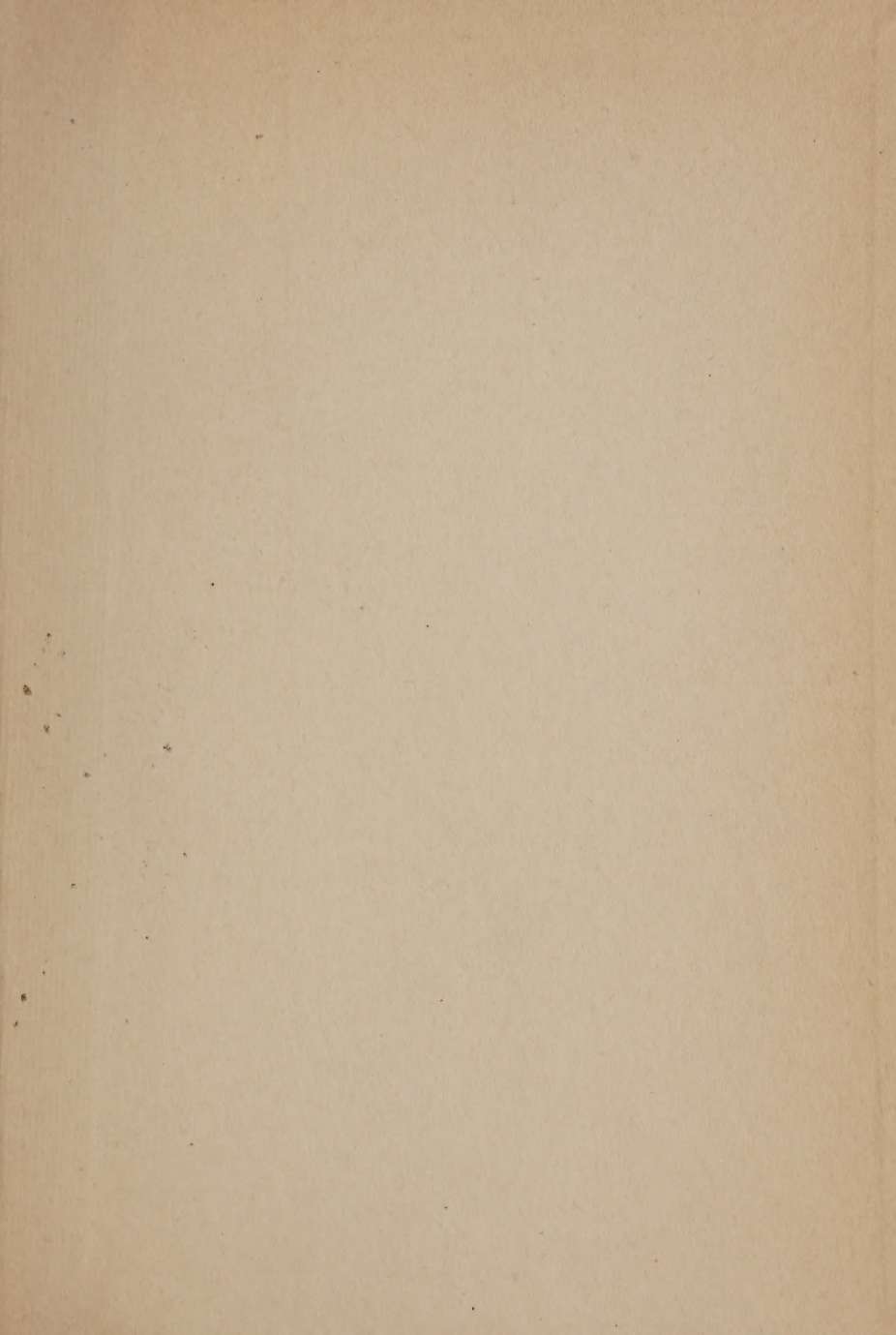
"If I'd only known you were coming," said Mrs. Green as they all sat down to supper, "I would have had a feast of all the things you like best."

"But we like everything now," said Phoebe. "Oh, how good it is to be at home."

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